

Krum

A Play with Two Weddings and Two Funerals

By Hanoch Levin

Translated from the Hebrew by Evan Fallenberg and Jessica Cohen

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Israeli Dramatists Website: <http://dramaisrael.org/en/>

Cast:

Krum

The Mother (Krum's mother)

Silenti

Gloomer

Dolce

Felicia (his wife)

Takhtikh

Trudy

Doopa

Tweety

Bertoldo

Dr. Sheboygan

Orderly, barber, nurse, groom, bride, photographer, undertaker

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Airport. Early evening. The Mother, Silenti.

The Mother: They've announced the plane has landed. In a moment I'll see my son. Here he comes.

(Krum enters with a suitcase and hugs The Mother.)

Krum: I had no success overseas, Mother. I didn't make money and I didn't become happy. I didn't have fun, I didn't get ahead, didn't get married, didn't get engaged, didn't meet anyone. I didn't buy anything, didn't bring anything. In my suitcase there is dirty underwear and toiletries. That's all, I've told you everything, and I want you to leave me in peace.

The Mother (eyeing the suitcase): There must be a surprise in there for me.

Krum: No.

The Mother: There must be a surprise for Mother.

Krum: No! No!

Mother: What are you shouting for?! Who wants anything from you?! Did you come back home to argue?! (She cries.)

Krum: Getting on my nerves already. You're very lucky I don't want to make a scene at the airport. Hello, Silenti. (Pointing to the crying Mother) It's from joy. Why didn't Gloomer come?

Silenti: He doesn't feel well. He's waiting for you at his place.

Krum: Let's go.

(They exit.)

Scene 2

Gloomer's balcony, next to the balcony of Dolce and Felicia. Early evening. Gloomer is sitting.

Gloomer: Mr. Dolce! Mr. Dolce! (Dolce steps out onto the balcony.) Excuse me for bothering you. In today's paper it says that crying opens up the diaphragm, and that a healthy person should cry from time to time.

Dolce: You want us to cry together? But my wife and I are about to leave for a wedding.

Gloomer: I thought I might ask you to put on a sad record. Sad music brings me straight to tears.

Dolce: You'll have to cry quickly because we're on our way out.

Gloomer: Could you possibly lend me your record player? I'll take care of it.

(Felicia enters.)

Felicia: You know we don't take the record player out of the house, except in cases when we're moving.

Dolce: But you can hear it from our apartment; after all, the windows are open.

Felicia: Put something on for him already and let's go.

Gloomer: A singer, if possible. If the singer cries, it's easier for me to cry.

Felicia: Put the Italian on for him.

(Dolce exits.)

Gloomer: Thank you. I feel that if I could only open up my diaphragm...

Felicia: I heard. (She exits. Sad music by an Italian vocalist can be heard. Gloomer tries to cry. The music stops. Dolce and Felicia appear in fine clothes, out on the street. They look in Gloomer's direction.)

Gloomer: I couldn't get it out. Not enough time.

Dolce: We're sorry, we don't want to miss the appetizers.

Felicia: Using our records to be happy, our records to be sad – do I dance to someone else's music?! Always taking advantage! People who don't have a record player should learn to cry from silence! (Dolce and Felicia exit. Gloomer tries to sing the song from the record, unsuccessfully. He stops.)

Scene 3

Gloomer's house. Evening. Gloomer. Krum enters.

Krum: Hello, Gloomer. I came back this evening.

Gloomer: You saw a few things, did you?

Krum: I didn't see anything. Most of the time I slept. They say life abroad, you know... Well, I didn't find it. I guess I like thinking about traveling more than traveling. You know me: I want lots of wants, but without any doing. Waiting as usual for the great novel of the century to be written by me. Waiting as usual to meet one day on the street, completely by chance of course, a rich, beautiful woman who suddenly desires me, and only me...

Gloomer: Of course not *me*, I'm no competition for you, I'm ill.

Krum: ...and above all, waiting to miraculously find myself one day outside this neighborhood, outside this city, in a white house surrounded by a garden, far from the buses and the fumes, with a beautiful, seductive wife and two children.

Gloomer: Name one of them after me.

Krum: One thing you have to admit I've managed to this very day, despite all my loafing: not getting married. Because to get married and have children here, in this neighborhood, on a clerk's salary, that's the end of your dreams. Look around at everyone here. It's a disgrace. No. Not me. I want a year or two for myself. To sit and write a novel about this neighborhood, to

make money off it and take my leave. Farewell, people, I made myself a little living off your lives and your suffering, and now I'm going to live. Good riddance. (Pause.) I'm only sorry about my mother. She's getting old. Wanted to live to see a grandchild.

Gloomer: Krum...

Krum: What's happened around here meanwhile?

Gloomer: Nothing. You probably heard that Trudy's going with someone else. His name is Takhtikh. Graduated from technical college, or will soon.

Krum: Trudy is mine the minute I call her. At the moment I'm just not interested. (He stands up.)

Gloomer: Krum, I wanted to ask you something.

Krum: I refuse to hear that question anymore.

Gloomer: Just one more time, Krum.

Krum: Absolutely not.

Gloomer: Be a mensch, Krum. Look, I'm sick. One little question with one little answer. Just tell me, "Yes" or "No."

Krum: God, why did I come back!

Gloomer: When is it better to exercise, in the morning or in the evening?

Krum: In the morning.

Gloomer: First let me list the pros and the cons for you.

Krum: I know all your pros and cons by heart already.

Gloomer: Let me give you the arguments one last time, and then you give me a last and final answer. It's no secret that the problem with my health is that to this day I can't decide if I should exercise in the morning or the evening. If I do it in the morning, before work, there's a risk that the exercising will wear me out and I'll be tired at work; and if I do it in the evening, before bed, there's a chance it'll be refreshing, and then I'll have trouble falling asleep. And midday is out of the question, because I'm not a man of compromise: with me it's either the start of the day or the end. There are other problems involved, like showering for example. If I decide to exercise in the morning, I take a shower afterwards, and then, what happens after work? Do I shower again? That's not realistic, especially in winter. And if I exercise at night, before bed, of course there's no point in showering in the morning, but then the question arises again: perhaps the water is refreshing, so the morning would be better. Fifteen years I've been grappling with the problem, and every time I make up my mind, I read an article in the newspaper that proves the opposite.

Why don't they, once and for all, hold an international medical conference on this issue and make a final decision? Honorable doctors: you are killing us. Now tell me your final answer, on condition that you've considered all the arguments.

Krum: Morning.

Gloomer: But what if the exercise tires me out?

Krum: Goodbye.

Gloomer: Answerme, you see how much I'm suffering. It's not like I enjoy these questions, but they're eating me up. Come on, tell me already, if done in the morning, does exercise tire you out?

Krum: Gloomer, you are a man with a morbid passion for health, and I have no more patience for you. That is my final answer.

Gloomer: Meaning, you answered "morning" just to get rid of the question. See? How can I take your answers seriously? What is the basis for your answer, when you say "morning"? Huh? Are you a doctor?

Krum: Good night. (He exits.)

Gloomer (to himself): As a result of all these gnawing doubts, I have taken ill. Taken ill. Exercising is out of the question now. Even crying, I can't do.

Scene 4

Café. Evening. Trudy and Takhtikh sit at a table. Silenti sits at a different table. Krum enters.

Krum: Hello, Trudy. I came back today.

Trudy: I see.

Krum: I wanted to write...

Trudy: Do you know each other? Takhtikh, Krum.

Krum: May I join you?

Trudy: We were just thinking of leaving.

Krum: It's not ten yet.

Trudy: I'm tired. (Trudy and Takhtikh stand up.) Good night. (Turns to leave with Takhtikh.)

Krum: I'll come to your place later.

(Trudy and Takhtikh stop. Pause.)

Takhtikh: He can walk you home.

Trudy: Why?

Takhtikh: Because. He can walk you home.

Krum: Why not? Shall I? (To Takhtikh) It was nice to meet you.

Takhtikh: I'm sure it was. (Sits down at Silenti's table. Krum approaches Trudy, who has moved away a little.)

Trudy: You don't love me and I'm trying to forget you. Why do you keep showing up again?!

(Pause.) You *do* love me a little.

Krum: No.

Trudy: Why do you torment me?

Krum: What do you want? I suffer from this, too. (He buries his head in her breast.)

Trudy: What am I doing, what am I doing? Once again sticking my head into something that can only end in sadness. (Krum pulls her outside. They exit.)

Takhtikh (to Silenti): Me and her... Nothing. Just friends. What do I care. They used to be together, didn't they? (Pause.) No? (Pause.) It's no good to be alive. Especially for someone who doesn't believe he deserves it. Have you ever felt your life, not from the inside, but outside, on your back, like a hump? (Pause.) Have you? (Pause.) You probably think you're really smart with those deep silences of yours. A Chinese philosopher. Do you want to become known for being silent? It won't do you any good, you're not the first. In this neighborhood, chatty people have died and silent people have died. (Pause.) I myself keep silent for an hour sometimes, and I don't make a big deal out of it. (He stands.) Shall we take a walk?

Silenti: I'm staying put.

Takhtikh: Me too. (Sits down.)

Scene 5

Trudy's house. Night. Krum and Trudy are getting dressed.

Trudy: Takhtikh is in love with me and is driving me crazy about marrying him. And that's what I'll do in the end. (Krum tries to knead her breast.) No, I've had enough. Don't play with my breasts, and don't ruin my life. I want a decision from you.

Krum: I can't get married. Not now. It clogs up all my plans. I'm starting to write regularly, which is why I need a period of quiet to be free. Financially, too. After that...

Trudy: There won't be any after that. I'll marry Takhtikh, we'll move to a new neighborhood, we'll have a kid, and when I run into you back here, arm in arm with your mother, with those same pants, those same plans, I'll laugh in your face.

Krum: You'll laugh in my face and I'll put that in my novel.

Trudy: Novel! I love that crap, and I myself don't know why. (Krum embraces her.)

Krum: Trudy.

Trudy (allowing him to embrace her): You don't believe a word that comes out of your mouth. You don't even try to convince me anymore. You know I'm yours, you just come and take.

Krum: Trudy.

Trudy: You're cold, so cold. When water gets dumped on your head, you come to me to dry off.

Krum: I'm a big louse, I know it. But you can see I'm trying, really. Look, who do I come to when things are bad, if not to you? Whose bed do I climb into when I don't have another, if not yours? And who do I keep trying, unsuccessfully, to love, if not you? I really am a big louse.

Slap me! (Trudy slaps his cheek, hard.) Whore, you'll never see me again. I was just about to propose to you, now it's all over. (Exits.)

Scene 6

Street in front of Trudy's house. Night. Takhtikh. Krum enters, sees Takhtikh, stops.

Takhtikh: Yes, it's Takhtikh. Standing here waiting half the night while you enjoy yourself upstairs with Trudy. I saw, I saw. At first the light was on, then you turned it off for an hour, then it was on again.

Krum: What do you want?

Takhtikh: To get to know the man who has Trudy.

Krum: My conscience is a little tired this evening, and I'm not sure you'll manage to wake it up.

Takhtikh: Let it sleep. And don't worry, I won't try to take Trudy back. I'm patient. So don't be in a hurry. And enjoy yourselves.

Krum: Tell me, why do you do that to yourself? You graduated from technical college.

Takhtikh: I didn't graduate from anything. I'm a technician. I make a decent living, but I'm just a technician.

Krum: You make me feel big. Get out of here already.

Takhtikh: Of course I'll leave if you tell me to, you're the boss. You have a free hand with Trudy. I just want you to know that even if you're small, I'm even smaller.

(They exit.)

Scene 7

Street outside Gloomer's balcony. Night. Gloomer is on the balcony. Dolce and Felicia enter the street, heavy with food and drink.

Gloomer: Hello, Mrs. Felicia and Mr. Dolce. How was the wedding?

Felicia: It was.

Gloomer: You ate a little, huh? What did you eat?

Felicia: Excuse me, but we're digesting now. Let's go in, Dolce.

Gloomer: Krum is back.

Felicia (stopping): Did he bring you something? Probably nothing. Well, I'll be making a visit tomorrow morning to Krum's mother.

Gloomer: Was there chicken?

Felicia (laughing contemptuously): Chicken? Chicken is a fly compared to what they had there.

Gloomer: You don't say!

Felicia: Finally, a contractor's wedding. But who has the strength to talk now, Dolce? We'll go inside to digest.

Dolce: I want to breathe a little more air.

Felicia: He doesn't want to see me undress. (She exits.)

Dolce (laboring to breathe): Oy, I'm full.

Gloomer: What else did they have there?

Dolce: Don't ask.

Gloomer: I won't dare even begin to be jealous.

Dolce: Oy, I'm full. I'm dying.

Gloomer: Probably had a band and dancing, too.

Dolce: Who could think about dancing? Who could even move? From the table to the toilet, from the toilet to the table – oy, I'm full. How full I am. One more bite and I'm dead. I'm going to go kill myself with a piece of cake. (Exits.)

Gloomer (to himself): I can't believe they didn't have dancing. Men and women dancing together, body to body, and with the music in the background, quietly making plans to get married.

Scene 8

Trudy's house. Early evening. Trudy and Doopa face the mirror.

Doopa: I'm so unattractive. When one's eye flutters over me and keeps going, it finds a certain charm in me, but when stared at, my full ugliness is revealed. How, Doopa, can I make the eyes merely flutter, the eyes merely flutter and not stare?

Trudy: A big butt. That's my problem.

Doopa: You can afford to say that because you know you're more attractive than I am. You've got Krum, and before that you had Takhtikh, and even before that you had Krum again.

Trudy: Great catches, the both of them. Krum comes and goes, comes and goes.

Doopa: With me, they don't even come. I'm frisky and cheerful and I chirp like a bird, and I have no one. I'm all closed up inside, I'm exploding. So many things I could give a man, devotion and love, infectious laughter, and I have no one. And I'm still cheerful.

Trudy: You've shriveled.

Doopa: From nerves. And I'm still cheerful.

Trudy: Krum has a friend, his name is Gloomer – would you be interested?

Doopa: Gloomer? What a name. Gloomer. Gloom and doom? (She laughs.) Is he serious?

Trudy: Who?

Doopa: Gloomer! I mean, is he thinking about marriage or about fooling around?

Trudy: Only marriage. He's not a guy for having a good time.

Doopa: Oy, how I've been wanting one of those! Someone who will sit around the house with me in pajamas, who will be completely mine, and I'll serve him and I'll tickle him. I pray he'll be handsome. And cheerful. I don't much care if he's smart, but let him be cheerful, and let him have good skin. And be financially sound. Nothing excessive, but sound. I really don't care about his brains. And I pray that he's—

Trudy: But why do you need to pray so much? Just ask me, I know him.

Doopa: What's he like, Trudy? I'm begging you, have mercy.

Trudy: Of all your prayers, I'm afraid there's only the pajamas. Haven't I lost weight off my hips? He's ugly. Very. So much so that it stops being an issue. If you find any charm in him, you'll be the first. If you find any cheerfulness in him, you'll be the first. Some of the time, he's sick. The rest of the time, he thinks he's sick. Pajamas, you wanted pajamas, you got it. What else? Money. If you find any money there, you'll be the first. And the last thing, in my opinion he's also stupid, but that you said doesn't matter to you. A big butt, that's my problem.

Doopa: Buy why?

Trudy: Why, why! Look at this butt, I'm also asking why!

Doopa (bursting into tears): Why? Why?

Trudy: But what kind of question is that, my dear Doopa? These are the men destined for us, and these are the ones we must take. Where is Doopa's famous cheerfulness?

Doopa (laughing): I'll find something nice in him, if it's the last thing I do. You'll see.

Trudy: If you can only get his pajamas off. Should I tell him to wait for you at the café this evening at eight?

(Doopa nods.)

Scene 9

Café.Evening.Gloomer is sitting at a table. Doopa enters and sits down at a different table.

Gloomer (eventually rising with hesitation): I think it's me.

(Doopa draws near.)

Are you already disappointed? (Pause.) My name is Gloomer.

Doopa: Doopa.

Gloomer: Sit.

(Doopa sits down.)

What are you drinking?

Doopa: A beer.

Gloomer: I never drink beer. I would like to be a man who drinks juice and milk. In reality, I drink tea. (Pause.) They're in no hurry to serve you here. It's not such a nice place. We could buy a bottle at the corner store and drink it at my place on the balcony.

Doopa: Not a good idea. I'm in a bit of a hurry anyway, I have something to take care of this evening. (Glancing at her watch.) Oy, it's already eight-fifteen. (She gets up.)

Gloomer: I could walk you.

Doopa: No need. Good night.

Gloomer: Could we... Could we meet again tomorrow?

Doopa: I'm busy tomorrow.

Gloomer: And...

Doopa: And after tomorrow too. Good night.

(Gloomer touches her hair fleetingly. Doopa leaves.)

Scene 10

Krum's house. Morning. Krum is sitting and eating. His mother sits across from him.

Krum: I can't stand it when people watch me while I'm eating and pin their hopes on me.

The Mother: Who's got hopes?! Who wants anything from you?!

Krum: You sit and watch me and pin your hopes on me day and night!

The Mother: What does he want from my life?! I was sitting here watching a fly! I'm not allowed to watch a fly in my own house?!

Krum: The fly is going to eat in a restaurant.

The Mother: Go, go to a restaurant! A meal you begin as a son, you'll finish as an orphan!

(Krum exits. Felicia enters.)

Felicia: Hello, Mrs. Krum. I saw Krum leaving, he looked angry.

The Mother: Emotional. He's emotional because he came back yesterday from abroad.

Felicia: If you say so. (Looking around) He didn't bring you anything?

The Mother: I have everything.

Felicia: A little television?

The Mother: I have a television.

Felicia: A domestic brand.

The Mother: The picture's fine.

Felicia: A leather jacket? A purse? A handkerchief? (Sniffing around) Oh well.

The Mother: Madam Felicia, my son returned from abroad in good health, and that is what is important. He is healthy, he works and makes a living, what more could I ask for? Look, he even managed to save a little from his wages for a trip to Europe.

Felicia: Mrs. Krum, Europe is not the issue here. Yes, he traveled. Although everyone travels these days. What is travel? A plane takes you and a plane brings you back. But never mind, he traveled. The real question is, is a person traveling toward something? Is he progressing to something, is he building something? And in particular, are there wedding bells in his future?

The Mother: Look, Mrs. Felicia, under no circumstances could I say that I'm disappointed in my son. He has talent, people have always said that.

Felicia: Of course, there's no need to skip right to disappointment. One can always keep waiting and hoping. Still, the question is, how long? A man does not stay forty forever.

The Mother: My son is thirty-eight.

Felicia: If you say so.

The Mother: And for hoping, thank God, I still have the strength.

Felicia: Of course you have the strength, Mrs. Krum, the question is whether there is any point.

The Mother: As long as he is healthy and feels well...

Felicia: "Healthy and feels well!" What is that, Mrs. Krum? Everyone is healthy, the question is what one does with one's health. Does a person know how to use the time when he is healthy? Does he have anything to show for being healthy? Furthermore, who among us can say, "I am healthy?" Illness, after all, gets the last laugh. *Pardonnez-moi*. I have no complaints, each to his own life. One person becomes a doctor, another a decorator. As long as you're pleased.

The Mother: Mrs. Felicia, I am absolutely pleased with my son.

Felicia: You are a stubborn woman, Mrs. Krum. Oh well. If you say so. You're pleased with your son, your son is pleased with you, and all I can do is envy you. (Pause.) Nothing? A little French cheese? Swiss chocolate? Oh well then. Now I've made myself hungry. I'm going to make lunch. Goodbye.

The Mother: Goodbye.

(Felicia exits. To herself) Another attack we've fended off. All one's life, fending off attacks. Widowhood attacks you from the front? Deprivation is already attacking from the rear. You fended off a rent attack? The municipality comes at you from the side. You fended off the municipality? Felicia is lying in wait. You fended off everyone? Climb into bed to fend off a long, empty night.

Scene 11

Krum's house. The Mother is sitting. Krum enters.

Krum: Mother, why aren't you asleep? (Pause.) Don't you feel well? Mother? Why don't you answer?

The Mother: Pressure.

Krum: Pressure where? Your heart? Do you have pain? Why aren't you talking?

The Mother: Pressure.

Krum: Should I call a doctor? Sometimes I have pressure in my heart, too. It goes away.

The Mother: Mine doesn't. "Mother, mother!" you'll say over my grave.

Krum: Mother, I'm warning you, I'm not a well man.

The Mother: You'll have many years left to be sorry.

Krum: I'm going to die, Mother, I'm warning you, I'm going to die.

The Mother: Who is the old lady here? Me. I'm going to die. I'm the old lady of the two of us. I'll die first. (Pause.)

Krum: All right. I'll marry Trudy. (Pause.) Pleased? Happy?

The Mother: Happy.

Krum: After all, you wanted me to marry. You wanted grandchildren.

The Mother: For me, you're doing this? Thank you very much, I have a television, that's enough for me.

Krum: You wanted me to get married! You!

The Mother: What are you yelling for in the middle of the night? Go yell at Trudy's. Go, go to Trudy.

Krum: You, as usual, are not satisfied.

The Mother: Is Trudy satisfied? Trudy doesn't have pressure? Go to Trudy.

Krum: What do you have against Trudy?

The Mother: I have something against Trudy? I wish you every happiness.

Krum: So go to sleep.

The Mother: When I want to go to sleep, I'll go to sleep. He likes it best when I'm asleep: I don't see, I don't ask, my nose just honks a little at the sky.

Krum: When you're asleep I'm innocent, when you're awake I'm guilty.

The Mother: And when I die you will hear the verdict!

Krum: Oh, blandness, blandness. I'm trapped between walls of blandness. Bland in my mouth.

Bland in my veins. Bland in front of my eyes. Bland, bland.

Scene 12

Gloomer at home. Evening. Doopa enters.

Doopa: Remember?

Gloomer: I thought I'd never see you again, and I... I've already moved on, emotionally. Sit.
(Doopa sits down. Pause.)

Doopa: You want explanations?

Gloomer: No. But I must say one thing: my nerves aren't built for uncertainties.

Doopa: I understand you. But what can I say after such a short acquaintance?

Gloomer: Perhaps I should rephrase my question: Could you explain what reason you could possibly have for not wanting to marry me? (Pause.) You have long pauses. Meanwhile, I fall apart.

Doopa (to herself): Dear God, don't let me grow sick of this man so quickly. You, who have not handed me many reasons to be happy, but you have granted me happiness itself: do not make me sick of this man. Make his weakness find the appropriate compassion within me, allow his lack of charm to touch my heart.

(Gloomer tries to caress her face. She turns her face away.)

Gloomer: Why?

Doopa: No looking. Eyes are crueller than fingers.

(Gloomer caresses her face while it is turned away.)

Gloomer: Except that if we ever want to... kiss, it'll have to be face-to-face.

(Doopa reaches her hand behind her and probes Gloomer's face.)

I haven't shaved. I didn't prepare for a woman this evening. (Pause.)

Doopa: My answer is: Yes.

Gloomer (turning her face towards him at once): I fully believe that I am a sick and weak man, that I eat and breathe with supreme effort, and that I will never be able to take my place in the world in a healthful manner. I fully believe that I should be pitied, understood, not shouted at, not startled, not battered, and made no demands of. I fully believe that if I am left in peace, absolute peace, I may manage to live another three or four months, at best six, after which I will decline. In your arms. Such a pity.

(Doopa laughs.)

You're already laughing at me.

Doopa: You are so... Picturesque.

Gloomer: Really? Do I seem picturesque to you? (Pause.) I think you're right. I really am picturesque. (Exuberant) Oh... I am picturesque. You hear that? I'm a picturesque man.

Picturesque, picturesque. Me. Stay the night.

Doopa: Turn the light off.

(Gloomer turns off the light. Pause.)

Gloomer: I feel nice, I feel good, I'm going to die. (Self-indulgently) I don't want to live, I don't want to live.

(They both laugh.)

And now I want to ask you one more question. Try to concentrate and answer me seriously.

Doopa: I'm listening.

Gloomer: When is it healthier to exercise, morning or evening?

Doopa: Kiss my ass.

Gloomer: What?

Doopa: I've been warned about that question.

Gloomer (to himself): Around here, I'm all played out. Maybe in Alaska they haven't heard of me yet. That's where I should go one day, to get a serious answer once and for all.

Scene 13

Street in front of Trudy's house. Night. Krum enters.

Krum: Trudy! (Pause.) Trudy!

(Takhtikh enters the street, shoes in hand.)

Takhtikh: You show up, you're the master, you're the man, you're number one, and I scurry off like a mouse. (He turns to leave. Trudy appears on the balcony.)

Trudy: Takhtikh...

Takhtikh: Make yourselves comfortable and don't worry about anything. (He exits.)

Trudy: The next time you show your face at my place, I'm calling the police.

Krum: We're getting married.

Trudy: When?

Krum: Right away. I mean, right after Gloomer.

Trudy: Come upstairs.

Krum: The bed is still warm from Takhtikh.

Trudy: Nothing's warm from Takhtikh. Come on.

Krum: So you admit that he was in your bed! Whore!

Trudy: You were gone for two weeks, what did you want me to do?!

Krum (getting closer to her): Okay, I'm sick of it, I'll marry you, but I'll tell you honestly so all my cards are on the table: above all, what I need is quiet. You know who I am and what I have, and I know who you are and what you have. I don't want any unnecessary tenderness between us, I don't want you caressing me outside of bed. Don't call me pet-names, don't hang on my neck in the street. In general, your expressions of love send chills down my back – like fingernails on a chalkboard. If you just put up with me, that'll be enough. That's all.

Trudy: If you wanted me to accept a marriage proposal like being spat at – I accept.

Krum (to himself): I'm still trying to find something lovely in her and I can't. But there must be something about her, if someone else wants her. But what? What?

(They exit.)

Scene 14

Doopa and Gloomer in Doopa's house. Evening.

Doopa: Trudy and Krum are getting married the week after us, and this evening the four of us are going to the movies to celebrate our engagements. I think that's them.

(Tweety and Bertoldo enter.)

Tweety: Hello, Doopa.

Doopa: Tweety! My God, it's Tweety!

Tweety: I got the invitation to your wedding. I'm so happy that you're finally getting married.

Meet Bertoldo. He's Italian. He speaks only Italian.

Bertoldo: Molto lieto [pleased to meet you].

Tweety: Speaks only Italian. (Pointing to Gloomer) The father?

Gloomer: I'm the groom.

Tweety: Sorry. It's because you look so...

Gloomer: Sick. Not old, sick.

Tweety: Feel better.

Gloomer: I won't.

Doopa: Tweety is my good friend from childhood. She used to live here, then she moved to a villa outside the city. Since then we've become exotic to her. She visits once every two years.

Tweety: You know how busy I am.

Doopa: But you must come to the wedding.

Tweety: That's just it, I'm going to Capri two days before with Bertoldo. So I was passing by and I stopped in to wish you congratulations.

(Krum and Trudy enter.)

Trudy: Hello.

Krum: Hello.

Doopa: Trudy, meet Tweety, my good friend from childhood. She used to live here. Now she's in a villa.

Trudy: Nice to meet you. Trudy.

Krum: Krum.

Tweety: Nice to meet you. This is Bertoldo, he's Italian.

Bertoldo: Molto lieto.

Krum (to Tweety): I seem to remember you, vaguely. You were very little when you moved away.

Tweety: I was seven.

Doopa: Seven, and she already moved to a villa outside the city. Imagine. And now she's going—where? To Capri.

Tweety: Just for two weeks. I'm very pressed for time.

Doopa: And she can't even make my wedding. By the way, Tweety, Krum and Trudy are also getting married.

Tweety: Bravo! Get married! Have some babies around here.

Doopa: We'll have some babies. We'll have some with pleasure. We're on our way to the movies now, will you join us, Tweety?

Tweety: I'm very pressed for time. I promised Bertoldo a night swim at the Hilton.

Bertoldo: Ho caldo, voglioaudare, tivogliostrappareunatetta sotto l'acqua. [I'm hot, I want to go already, I want to tear into your tits under the water].

Tweety: Due minuti, Bertoldino, comportati come sideve. [Two minutes, Bertoldino, behave yourself.]

Bertoldo: Mihannorotto le ballequestischifosi, tivoglioscopare al Hilton. [I'm sick of these disgusting people. I want to fuck you at the Hilton already.]

(He pounces on Tweety, hugs her and tries to unbutton her blouse.)

Tweety: Basta, Bertoldo! No! [Enough, Bertoldo!No!]

(She pushes him away.)

Forgive him, he's Italian. Are you going to live here?

Doopa: Until we find something better.

Tweety: What's wrong with this place? And your man...

Gloomer: Gloomer.

Tweety: Groomer? All right, Groomer it is. At least he looks quiet.

Gloomer: Weak. Not quiet, weak.

Bertoldo: Madonna miasanta, tisbatto qui per terra e tichiavodavanti a questisorci. [My holy Madonna, I will knock you down on the ground here and fuck you in front of all these rats.]

(Pounces on Tweety again, trying to rip her blouse off, manages to pull off a button.)

Tweety: Basta, Bertoldo! [Enough, Bertoldo!]

Down, you horny thing! Down!

Bertoldo: Si, si, down, down.

Tweety (to Doopa): They're impossible, I'm telling you, they're impossible. (Trying to button up.)He knocked a button off.

(Krum and Gloomer bend over slightly to look for the button on the floor. They slowly get down on their knees and start crawling on all four and searching in every corner of the room.)

In any case, Groomer, take care of Doopa, she deserves it after so many years of loneliness.

Doopa: I never complained.

Tweety: Then why is your face so gray? And why is there no light in your eyes? No, no, you complained, and rightfully so. You cried at night, you couldn't fall asleep because of the suffocating feeling in your throat that you deserved something too. Something. (Pointing at the crawling Gloomer) And there is the something.

Gloomer: What color is the button?

Krum: Maybe it rolled into the hallway.

Gloomer: But what color was it?

(They both continue to crawl around, searching.)

Bertoldo: Via, via, andiamo, o tispruzzosulsoffittotuttoquelche ho qui neipantaloni. [We're leaving now, or I'll spray everything I have here in my pants on the ceiling!]

(He pounces on Tweety. She tries again to get away from him, but he does not let go. He gives her a deep kiss on her mouth while everyone watches. He comes.)

Tweety (breathless): Oh, these Italians – savages!

(Bertoldo tries to grab her again.)

Enough, Bertoldo, enough! Down, you horny thing! Down! Cercamiilbottone, arza! [Down, boy! Look for my button!]

(Bertoldo grabs her and tosses her in the air. Tweety laughs.)

All right, I have to go, Doopa. He's like a cat, he doesn't care if it's a public place, especially since he's not in his own country. So congratulations, everyone. You deserve it, all of you. You really do. (To Bertoldo) Avanti. [Let's go.]

Bertoldo: Chevadano a fan culo con la loro casa, Amen! [They can go fuck themselves in the ass with their house, amen!]

Doopa: Bye, Tweety. Thanks for coming.

(Tweety and Bertoldo exit.)

And come visit!

Krum: The button. (He picks it up. He and Gloomer look at the button.)

Trudy: A button. Big deal, a button. What, you've never seen a button before?

(Krum puts the button in his pocket.)

Krum: She left a faint scent in the air here. The scent of a faraway place.

Gloomer: My nose is stuffed up.

Trudy: If I used imported soap like her, I'd also have a faint scent of a faraway place.

Doopa: All right, let's go to the movies already. We're late.

(They exit.)

Scene 15

Cinema.Night.Takhtikh and Silenti sit in one row. In the dark, Krum, Trudy, Doopa and Gloomer enter.

Gloomer: Is this darkness or have I finally gone blind?

Trudy: Shhhh, the film's started.

(They sit down in the row in front of Takhtikh and Silenti.)

Krum: O projectionist,

Darken the cinema,

So we will not see each other,

And will not have to

Look each other in the eye.

And now,

Show us a film,

Let it be riveting, and light and colorful,

With lovely, happy people,

Dressed well,

And beautiful, naked girls,

And houses with gardens, and fast, shiny cars.

And we shall sit in the dark,

Gazing at the light,

And drown the sorrow and indignity of our lives

In it for two whole hours.
And we shall imagine in our hearts that we are the lovely people,
And with us are the beautiful, naked girls,
And ours are the houses with gardens
And the fast, shiny cars.

O motion picture,
Flickering strip of light,
On you all our hopes are pinned,
And on you, O projectionist,
Seated above our heads, who gives us, for the price of a ticket,
Two hours of true life
Within the lie that is our lives.

(The film ends. The lights go up. Everyone is grinning foolishly.)

Rise, wretched people. The film is over, be ashamed to live.

(They all stand up.)

Takhtikh: Hello, Trudy. Hello, Krum.

Trudy: Hello.

Takhtikh: Here we all are.

Trudy: That's how it is.

(Krum, Trudy, Doopa and Gloomer exit. Takhtikh looks at Silenti for a moment.)

Takhtikh: And I'm stuck with you again, hey? The one I came in with, he's the one I leave with. Tell me, don't you have any girlfriends who are throwing a party right now, or who we can ask out? A cousin? An aunt?(Pause.) No miracles are going to happen to me, not to Takhtikh.

Scene 16

Trudy and Krum on the street outside Trudy's house. Night.

Krum: Good night.

Trudy: You're not coming up?

Krum: I'm going to sleep.

Trudy: What's wrong with you?

Krum: Nothing, why?

Trudy: You liked her.

Krum: Who?

Trudy: The one you haven't stopped thinking about for the past three hours. The one with a faint scent of a faraway place and two grown men on their knees looking for her button.(Pause.) Hug me.

(Krum hugs her.)

Kiss me.

(Krum kisses her.)

More.

(Krum kisses her.)

Thanks to her, I get your most tender kisses. You know you'll never have her, no matter how hard you try. You have me, only me. I am your beauty, I am your glory. With me you live, for me you work, and from me you expect your children; at my side you fall ill, in my presence you collapse, and before my eyes you die, and beneath me you are buried, and to me you leave your clothes and your money and your name and your pictures! In my memory you still flicker from time to time, and in my oblivion you will be lost forever. I, and me, and beside me, and in me.

(She exits.)

Krum (to himself): Impressive biography, Krum. A woman excreted you – a woman swallowed you. O, holes – the garbage is ready. (He leaves.)

Scene 17

A street outside a wedding hall. Evening. Gloomer and Doopa enter wearing wedding clothes.

They seem to be in a rush. Felicia, Dolce, Krum, Trudy, The Mother, Takhtikh and Silenti follow them. Gloomer turns around every so often and waves his hands victoriously.

Gloomer: I got married! I got married!

Krum: Bravo, Gloomer! Bravo!

(Felicia stands before Gloomer and opens her mouth wide.)

Gloomer: Would you like to sing something?

Dolce: My wife wants to know if, other than a piece of cake and a glass of wine, there's no hope.

Doopa: You can see this is a hasty wedding. My husband is sick.

Felicia: But we're healthy.

Gloomer (waving a hot water bottle in the air): I'm sick. Mrs. Krum, thank you for the gift, I'll use it tonight.

The Mother: May you live a long life.

Gloomer: And here's to your son's marriage!

The Mother: If he doesn't have a little funeral first.

Gloomer (waving his arms victoriously again): Good night everyone, and thank you. I got married!

(He dashes off, followed by Doopa, Krum, Trudy, The Mother, Takhtikh, Silenti. Pause.)

Felicia: No music, no food. And it's only ten o'clock. Ten.

Dolce: It's a good thing I pocketed a bottle of cognac right at the beginning. (He removes a bottle from his breast pocket.)

Felicia: This whole wedding has the whiff of a funeral to me.

(Dolce drinks. She takes the bottle from his hand and drinks. Dolce grabs it back and drinks.)

What do you think – is the groom going to bury the bride, or the bride the groom?

(Dolce drinks.)

The bride the groom, I say.

(She grabs the bottle from him and drinks.)

Dolce: Where is the moon?

Felicia: And now in a week's time we have Krum and Trudy's wedding. As far as I'm concerned, I'm already dressed.

Dolce: Where is the moon?

Felicia: What do you need a moon for?

Dolce: It reminds me of a banana. I can't find the moon.

Felicia (pointing at her behind): It's here, come in and look for it.

Dolce (sadly, to himself): What a vulgar, stinking woman I got. What a vulgar, stinking woman I got.

Felicia: What do you think – am I going to bury you, or you me?

Dolce (grabbing the bottle back): Let's go home.

Felicia: I want to dance.

Dolce: There's no music here.

Felicia: We'll wait.

Dolce: It's the middle of the street. At night.

Felicia: I want to dance.

(Pause. From far away comes the truncated sound of a wail. Gloomer appears on his balcony, sobbing and waving his arms victoriously.)

Gloomer: I'm crying! I've opened up my diaphragm! I'm crying!

(His voice breaks. He buries his face in his hands and keeps crying. His crying slowly turns into a rhythmic sobbing. Felicia takes Dolce in her arms, and the two begin to dance to the rhythm of Gloomer's sobbing.)

- End Act One -

ACT TWO

Scene 18

A street outside the wedding hall. Evening. Trudy and Takhtikh enter in wedding clothes. They seem to be in a hurry. Followed by Doopa, Dolce, Felicia, Silenti.

Trudy (to Doopa): Why didn't Gloomer come?

Doopa: He suddenly felt a weakness in his legs.

Trudy: Send him my best.

(Felicia stands before Trudy and opens her mouth wide.)

Dolce: My wife would like to know...

Trudy: The wedding's over. Thanks to all of you and good night.

Felicia: But we are people who eat!

(Trudy holds Takhtikh's arm and hurries out with him. Doopa follows. Pause.)

Felicia: This one was even shorter than the last one. Obviously, when the groom is switched at the last minute, they try and finish as quickly as possible, out of embarrassment.

Dolce: I'm going crazy. With me, I'm either starving or stuffed. In the end I'll die.

Felicia (to Silenti): When's your turn?

(Silenti exits.)

Dolce (pointing to his empty breast pocket): No luck.

(Felicia scowls. Dolce takes out a bottle from his other breast pocket. Felicia's face lights up.

They exit.)

Scene 19

Trudy and Takhtikh's balcony. Trudy is in her nightgown.)

Takhtikh (offstage): Trudy. (He enters.)

Trudy: Are you getting some fresh air, or do you regret settling for me?

Trudy: What a pain in the neck!

Takhtikh: I'm feeling such wonderful tranquility now that I'm constantly afraid I'll lose it.

(Pause.) Shall I make us tea and cookies?

Trudy: That's the most brilliant idea you've had in the last two weeks.

Takhtikh (excited): Tea with cookies. Oh, tea with cookies. (He exits, humming to himself)

Trudy, Trudy, my Trudy...

Trudy (to herself): Trudy. That's my name. I won't pretend it doesn't move me to hear someone singing it. Trudy. I never knew my name could be whispered so sadly, so tenderly, that it would suddenly take on such meaning. And when I hear him sing my name, that sensitive, devoted man who is now putting the kettle on, I can't help but feel something for him.

(Takhtikh enters.)

Takhtikh: The tea...

Trudy: Oh Takhtikh, Takhtikh, if only you weren't such an idiot, with those puppy-dog eyes you look at me with...

Takhtikh (looking at her, holding his breath in wonder): Trudy, you are a princess.

Trudy: Stop talking nonsense.

Takhtikh: I'm telling you, you are a princess. Trudy. (She kisses him with affection.)

Trudy: I understand what you mean, but I'm not a princess. Maybe a manager, that I could see, but not a princess.

Takhtikh (brimming with emotion, embraces her): Oh manager, manager. I have a manager. And what a manager! Chairman of the board of managers! (He leads her out.)

Scene 20

Felicia, Dolce and Silenti stand on the street outside Gloomer's house. Krum enters.

Krum: What happened?

Felicia: Gloomer lost his balance and fell.

Krum: He fell?! Just like that?

Felicia: Gone are the days when it took a man months to fall. In the twentieth century you get up and next thing you know you fall down.

(Krum turns to enter Gloomer's house.)

Dr. Sheboygan is with him.

(Krum stops. Pause. Everyone waits.)

Dolce: The doctor is coming out, the doctor is coming out!

(Dr. Sheboygan enters, stands in the doorway of the house, regards the onlookers.)

Sheboygan: I have given instructions to move the patient, Gloomer, to the hospital. I suspect a disorder in the nervous system. He must undergo thorough examinations.

Felicia: Thorough!

Sheboygan: I will not go into the details at this point. The reason for the disorder might be profound or it might be superficial, it might be physical or it might be mental, it might be temporary or it might be eternal.

Felicia: Eternal!

Krum: Pity him, Doctor, he has only just found joy in his life.

Felicia: Pity all of us, Doctor. (She turns her behind to him.) And give us one big shot for a life of joy.

Dolce (turning his behind to the doctor, too): A shot for a healthy life, a life of good earnings, Doctor.

(Silenti hesitates for a moment, then turns his behind to the doctor.)

Felicia: A shot for a different life, a different life, Doctor.

Dolce: A life of healthy appetite, Doctor.

Felicia: And a warm, full belly.

Sheboygan (silencing them with a wave of his hand): The medical profession firmly rejects your petition for mercy. The medical profession will feel no sorrow for your illnesses and your deaths. The medical profession will not pity your poverty, your crowded houses, the polluted air that you breathe and the noise that rattles your sleep at night. Furthermore, the medical profession will not collude with your dreams of a different life, a better life, life as it should have been. All that the

medical profession is capable of doing is to heal you if it can, and in most cases it cannot. (He walks past the rear-ends and exits.)

Scene 21

Gloomer and Doopa at home. Evening. Gloomer is in bed.

Gloomer: I must take my leave of this room. I will never see it again. Now someone else will live here, someone healthy, who will enjoy my bed and my hotplate. With you: you are healthy.

(The Orderly enters with a stretcher.)

And here's another healthy person.

(The Orderly approaches Gloomer's bed.)

The thing I have been awaiting has truly arrived. It has truly arrived. I can't believe it. I don't understand. Where exactly am I?

(The Orderly is about to help Gloomer onto the stretcher.)

No, wait a minute, it can't be. I'm always sick, I'm Gloomer, ask anyone, it's nothing serious with me. I was joking. I was joking all these years. Is this what I deserve? I swear, I wasn't being serious.

Orderly: Come on.

Gloomer: Me? Are you talking to me? Honestly, he means me. That I should go. That I should go with him to the hospital. God, he really means that I should go with him to the hospital. To the hospital. Me. But why? After all, I am me. Do you hear, Sir? I am me. (Shouting) If this is a dream, I demand to wake up now!

(The Orderly grabs his shoulder.)

You're not a dream, are you?

Orderly: Why should I be a dream? I have a wife and kids, I want to live, too. (He tries to drag Gloomer onto the stretcher.)

Gloomer: Thank you, I can do it myself. I'm healthy. See for yourself. (He is barely able to stand. He wobbles.) No, on my own. (He cannot stand.) In any event, it's best to reduce the distance between the head and the floor. (He gets down on all four.) Here we go. This way. This

should be proposed to the Minister of Health. (Falls flat on his belly.) Even better. Safer yet. Slowly but surely. (Crawling) See? Healthy. (He stops. His head falls to the floor.) Healthy. (The Orderly and Doopa lift him and place him on the stretcher.)

Orderly: Let's go.

Doopa (running her hand over Gloomer's face): I'll come tomorrow morning.

(The Orderly begins to push the stretcher.)

Gloomer (to The Orderly): She won't come.

(They exit.)

Scene 22

Hospital. Evening. Gloomer lies in bed. Krum and Silenti are next to him.

Gloomer: You see? You see I'm sick? And you made fun of me all this time, and I was tempted to believe you. You led me astray. What kind of people are you? One should never, ever believe one is healthy. One is always sick – always! When you're sick you're sick, and when you're healthy you're sick. Where is Doopa?

Krum: I don't know.

Gloomer: Why isn't she here? I wanted to die in the presence of a woman crying in the room – is that such a grandiose ambition? What kind of people are you? (To Silenti) Why don't you say something? What do the doctors say, Krum? Am I going to live?

Krum: Yes.

Gloomer: Oh sure. If a doctor tells me I'm going to live—that's the end. I don't see them curing me. They aren't even doctors, they're just models in white coats.

(The Barber enters, pushing a small cart with his instruments. He walks to the head of Gloomer's bed.)

Doctor, how many white blood cells? How many?

Barber: Sorry, I'm the barber.

Gloomer: You see? White coats! They're all barbers! They've brought me to a barbershop!

Barber: Please sit up. I'll shave your head.

Gloomer: Why?

Barber: For the operation. (He begins shaving Gloomer's head.)

Gloomer: Operation. They'll cut me open. And where? In the hardest place to open – the head. They're not going to cut me. No. Not Gloomer. With Gloomer they'll carve me up. Not much work on this head, huh?

Barber: Just a little in the back.

Gloomer: Mother Nature herself prepared me for the operation.

Barber: I used to have a barbershop on the outside. Mostly for kids. I don't like kids, they go wild, they won't sit still. I like it better in here. The customers are quiet, they let me do my job. (He finishes and holds a mirror up to Gloomer.) Take a look. (He puts his instruments on the cart. To Krum) Be well. (He leaves.)

Krum: We'll go now, too. Good night, Gloomer. We'll see you in three days, after the operation.

Gloomer: And make sure Doopa comes. I want a crying woman. Tell her: It's included in the marriage.

Silenti: Good night.

(Krum and Silenti leave.)

Gloomer: You'll miss me yet! (To himself) God, forgive me. I was a man of surfaces, I lived a life on the surface. But if I never got around to having a sublime thought, it's only because I didn't have time to solve my exercise problem. And when I ask you today to forgive me and make things easier for me, it's only because I believe that my suffering from the exercise issue was great, so great, and could have stacked up to any sublime suffering. The amount of my suffering, God, is the only thing to my credit, because without it I have nothing. Nothing.

(Nurse enters, holding a syringe.)

What now? Manicure? Pedicure?

Nurse: A shot to help you sleep well. (She injects him.) Now sleep.

Gloomer (slightly drowsy): Don't go. Why are you going? Have you forgotten me? Have you forgotten everything between us? The fire, the passion, the power? Come with me. I've made you a nice little house, where we will spend the rest of our days, and in the house there is a bathtub large enough for the two of us, I will soap you and the two of us will know nothing but joy.

Nurse: Good night. (She leaves.)

Gloomer: I have made many women happy, and I will make you happy too.

Scene 23

Doopa at home. Evening. Bertoldo enters.

Bertoldo: Ciao, buon-giorno. [Hello. Good day.]

Doopa: Ah, the Italian. Time to start singing. What are you doing here? Where's Tweety?

Bertoldo (gesticulating): Partita ieri, tornera fra due giorni, Bertoldo solo, solo. [She went abroad yesterday. She'll be back in two days. Bertoldo is alone, alone.]

Doopa (laughing): Tweety's gone for three days, and you're looking for company? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

Bertoldo: Si, Si. [Yes, yes.]

Doopa: Sit down.

(Bertoldo sits next to her, places his hand on her shoulder. Doopa removes it.)

My husband is sick. (She tries to explain with hand gestures.) My husband. Sick. Hospital. *Hospitale.*

Bertoldo: Si, si, hospitale. (He returns his hand to her shoulder, Doopa removes it again.)

Doopa: Actually, maybe you know – what do you Italians say, when is it better to exercise?

Morning or evening? (She tries to explain using hand gestures.) Exercise. Sport.

Bertoldo: Si, si sport!

Doopa (starts demonstrating exercises, raising her arms up and to the sides. Bertoldo looks at her breasts, and suddenly comes from behind and puts his arms around her so that his hands are on her breasts. Doopa does not protest. She freezes for a minute, then, to herself) Here you are, Doopa. Italy.

(Bertoldo hugs and kisses her, and she responds. Krum enters.)

Krum: Excuse me.

(Doopa stands up.)

I just came to tell you about the operation. It was a success. The tumor they removed was malignant. (Pause.) It would be nice if you visited him, at least once. There's not much time left.

Bertoldo (rising): Ma cosavualequelcazzo. [What does he want, the prick?]

Krum: I have the doctors' permission to take him to the seashore tomorrow, to watch the sunset for the last time. So if you would like...

Bertoldo (approaching Krum): Ma cosavuo, perche disturb! Perche non ci lasci in pace, non vedichesi amoooccupati! [What do you want? Why are you disturbing us? Why don't you leave us alone? You can see we're busy!]

(Krum exits. Bertoldo returns to Doopa and puts his hand on her shoulder. She removes it.)

Bertoldo: O, tutto da capo! [Oh, back to square one!]

(He puts his hand on her again, she removes it. He tickles her neck, she shakes her head. He tickles her breast, she refuses.)

Doopa: To the Hilton.

Bertoldo: Hilton?

Doopa: Hilton!

Bertoldo: Ma va' fan' culo col tuo Hilton! [Go fuck yourself in the ass with your Hilton!]

(They exit.)

Scene 24

Park facing the sea. Twilight. Krum enters quickly, followed by Silenti pushing a wheelchair in which Gloomer sits, wearing a large hat.

Krum: Because of all those traffic jams, we're late, and now there are only a few minutes before the sun sets. Over here, Silenti, quick. Here's the park, from here we can watch the sea and the sunset. Turn him with his face to the sun.

Gloomer: Fresh air, air that smells of sport.

Krum: Gloomer, look at the horizon. The sun is almost setting.

Gloomer: Why are you rushing me out here to see the sun? What's the big deal...

Krum: Look, look at the color of the sky. And have a look at the flowers around us, too.

Gloomer: Had I only breathed in this kind of air my whole life...

Krum: To your left is the Hilton Hotel. Silenti, turn him toward the Hilton. Look, Gloomer.

Tweety went to swim in the Hilton pool. Remember Tweety?

Gloomer: Tweety. But what's with you guys, bringing me out here to see--

Krum: Oh, the sun, the sun! We're going to lose the sun! Seize the sun, Gloomer! Seize it!

Gloomer (straightening up in his wheelchair, startled): Krum! Am I seeing the sun for the last time?! The last time?!

Krum: The sun! The sun!

Gloomer (taken aback): No! The sun hurts me!

Krum: Hilton!

Gloomer: Hilton hurts me!

Krum: Look at the sea, Gloomer, seize the blue. Gloomer!

Gloomer: The blue hurts me! The sea hurts me! The whole world hurts me!

Krum: Look, look Gloomer, look! A ship! That way, a ship!

Gloomer: The last one? The last one, Krum? Won't there be any more ships? Not even one?! A boat? A drawing of a boat?!

Krum: It's sailing away! Seize it!

Gloomer: No!

(A photographer, bride and groom rush in.)

Photographer: We're missing the sunset. Stand over there on the boulder facing the sea.

(The bride and groom position themselves in front of Gloomer.)

Krum: And here are a bride and groom.

Gloomer: No! They're hurting me! They shouldn't get married!

Photographer: Look at one another and smile.

(The Bride and Groom smile at each other. The photographer snaps pictures.)

Krum: Look: a bride smiling with a sunset in the background.

Gloomer: I want my picture taken with them.

Photographer (to Groom): Embrace her.

(The Groom embraces the Bride.)

Gloomer: I want to be in the picture too.

(Krum approaches the Bride and Groom.)

Photographer: Sir, you're in the way. We have to catch the sun.

Krum (quietly, to the Groom): My friend is sick. He's come to take his leave of this world. He wants to have his picture taken with you.

Groom: Sick? We're happy people, getting our wedding pictures taken.

Krum: One shot. For him. So he'll remain in a picture with a happy couple.

Groom (to Bride): What do you say?

Bride: I'm sorry, but that'll bring us bad luck.

Photographer: Kiss.

(The Bride and Groom kiss.)

Gloomer: With them! With them!

Bride: Take him away from here.

Gloomer: I got married too! Where's Doopa?! (He holds his hand out to the Bride and Groom. The photographer shoots pictures.)

Photographer: That's it. Sun's gone. To the wedding hall. (He leaves. The Groom approaches Krum.)

Groom: With all due respect to a man taking his leave of this world, we don't get the chance to get married every day. (He turns to leave with the Bride.)

Gloomer (calling after them): Show me your ass!

(The Bride and Groom, alarmed, huddle together and run off.)

Krum: It's getting dark. Let's get back to the hospital. (To Gloomer) One last glance at the sea? (Gloomer's head sinks between his shoulders and he does not react. They exit.)

Scene 25

Trudy's house. Early evening. Trudy, pregnant, is sprawled in an armchair. Doopa enters with a suitcase.

Doopa: Hello, Trudy. I came to say goodbye.

Trudy: Gloomer is on his deathbed.

Doopa: I'm going away.

Trudy: Where to?

Doopa: I've been offered a job in a supermarket up north. Check-out girl. Lots of men go through the check-out, maybe one will stop. (Pause.) What's there between him and me, Trudy? I don't know him at all, I only know his illnesses. The wedding didn't take. The few times I managed to sleep beside him in bed and listen to him moaning, that didn't take either. There was nothing between us. We didn't have the time. (Pause.) You're looking at me like a whore. What? It's very convenient to have a Doopa in the world. Doopa will marry the dying ones. Doopa will lay them in their graves. Doopa will take it on herself, all the filth. (Pause.) Doopa is on her way, people! To the great expanse of the supermarket! My laughter will chime with the coins in the register. A cheerful man will pass by and buy American cigarettes and aftershave and he'll tear me from the cashier's stool straight to the airport.

(Meanwhile, Trudy has fallen asleep without Doopa noticing.)

I feel a little sorry for him and I kind of make myself sick. So what? Trudy? (Pause.) You've fallen asleep. You get tired quickly these days. Absorbed by your pregnancy. You've made yourself a nice home, too. (She gets up and takes her suitcase.) And you'll be holding a baby soon. (She sneaks out. Takhtikh enters. He wakes Trudy).

Takhtikh: Chairman of the board of managers.

(They leave.)

Scene 26

Hospital. Early evening. Gloomer lies in bed. Krum and Silenti are next to him.

Krum: Doopa's gone. She won't be back.

Gloomer: Doopa? She's ugly. Let her go. Krum, go to a sporting goods store tomorrow and buy me a pair of tennis shoes and a racket. In the end I've decided: afternoon, tennis. If I play tennis with beautiful girls in the afternoon, I'm getting exercise *and* I'm spending time with women. Tennis in the afternoon is best.

Krum: Tomorrow I'll buy you sneakers.

Gloomer: Krum, I want to be healthy, I want to be healthy! What I've lived until now, that wasn't living. I was just preparing for life, I was just making plans, that's not called living, that's not called living! (Quietly) The worse it gets for me, the more I cling to life. Like a fly to filth. What a disgrace. (He cries silently.) They don't give you a minute's rest, then they lay you to rest. (Pause. Stops crying.) And what's outside? Spring? What else? I'm in the hospital and outside what else would there be but spring?

Krum: Outside it's cold and gray. The weather is unpleasant.

Gloomer: But I can see the sun from here.

Krum: The clouds have covered it up.

Gloomer: I miss out on so many things if I die.

Krum: You're not missing anything.

Gloomer: Yes I am. I'm missing so much.

Krum: You're not missing anything, Gloomer, I'm telling you you're not. Look at us, look at our lives, look at the lives we still have to drag out – what are you missing out on?! Look at our houses. Look at our women. Think of the daily effort to make a living, to get a little more! Think of the lack of grace in our lives, the lack of beauty, the lack of love, because no one taught us how to grab it when it's handed to us! Think of the senseless running around from place to place, the endless roaming at nights, and the never-ending games we have to play – what are you missing out on? What are you missing out on, Gloomer?!

Gloomer (his voice weakening): I'm missing, I'm missing...

Krum (as if shrinking; Silenti does the same): Look at us, Gloomer, is this what you're missing out on? This? This face? This back? These knees? These last few convulsions on Earth before they put us in?!

(He and Silenti shrink inward. And suddenly Gloomer starts to shrink inward too, as if taking part in their game. Krum and Silenti, in response, shrink even further, and then, all at once Gloomer stops and lies motionless. Krum and Silenti freeze for a moment, then try another movement or two to awaken Gloomer, but Gloomer does not react.)

Gloomer? (Pause.) Gloomer, do you understand? (Pause.) Gloomer?

(Dr. Sheboygan and a nurse enter quickly. Sheboygan leans over Gloomer, then straightens up, covers Gloomer's face with a blanket, and turns to Krum.)

(Defensively) Don't tell us that... (Trying to dodge) Don't tell us that...

Sheboygan: He's dead.

(Krum stands still.)

He's dead. He has moved from the domain of medicine to a no-man's-land. This man is forsaken. The years of his upbringing and molding, the food he ate, the books he read, the medicine he took, the dreams his brain produced, the huge amount of work and the money of the people who prepared his life for him, all of it, all the investment has now come to nothing, and its remnants—forsaken.

Krum: Nevertheless, he made us laugh a little.

Sheboygan: He made you laugh? Who are you?! You will be forsaken, too.

(The Orderly enters, wheels out Gloomer's bed, leaves with the nurse. Sheboygan turns to leave.)

Krum: Doctor.

(Sheboygan stops.)

You will forgive me, but you're speaking like an undertaker. You are a doctor. You must leave some hope, if not for the dead then for the living.

Sheboygan: Yes. There is still one hope.

Krum: You see?

Sheboygan: You must hope for exhaustion.

Krum: For exhaustion?

Sheboygan: Yes. There is still one hope. You must hope for exhaustion. What will ultimately heal you is exhaustion. You will grow old, you will weaken, and with weakness comes rest. And just as you will have no more strength to be happy, so will you also be too weak to shout, to protest, to suffer. Serenity will then come to you, and you will sink into it. You will be very, very peaceful, you will be the peaceful remnant of a low, sunken, orderly life. A thick layer of ash will cover all the loves that have ended, that were cut off, that you dreamed of and never were, and that left you, in the end, alone. And then, very quietly, without defiance or bitterness, you will begin one day to die. You will take no interest in life, in God, in hope, in the meaning of your life. A tiny sliver of strength will remain in you, just enough to face hope with a blank stare, a stare that will also gradually blur. Until you die. So hope for exhaustion.

Scene 27

Street outside Dolce and Felicia's house. Late morning. Felicia is dressed up.

Felicia: Dolce! We're late! The bris is at noon, and as I remember their wedding, they have a tendency to finish quickly.

(Dolce enters, dressed nicely.)

Do you think they'll have table service or just a buffet?

(The Undertaker enters across the stage, pulling a gurney with Gloomer's body on it, shrouded in black. Behind the gurney are Krum, The Mother, Silenti carrying a suitcase. Felicia and Dolce see the funeral procession and try to quickly get away to the other side. Krum notices them.)

Krum: Mr. Dolce! Mrs. Felicia! The funeral procession is here!

Dolce: I'm sorry, but we've got Trudy and Takhtikh's bris.

Felicia: We can't do everything. We're not birds.

(Dolce and Felicia leave in haste.)

Scene 28

Cemetery. Midday. The Undertaker pulls the gurney with Gloomer on it. He is followed by Krum, Silenti and The Mother.

Undertaker: No relatives?

Krum: None.

Undertaker: We'll keep things short, then. (He lowers the body into the grave.)

Krum: Be gentle. He was sick.

(The Undertaker buries Gloomer. He holds his hand out to Krum. Krum takes a bill out of his pocket and gives it to him. The Undertaker puts the cash in his pocket and holds out his hand again.)

Undertaker: For being gentle.

(Krum gives him another bill. The Undertaker leaves. The Mother leaves after him.)

Krum (to the grave): And now from your death, Gloomer, from your death and from your suffering, I'll gather momentum and finally start writing seriously. Because I may never have this opportunity again.

(He exits with Silenti.)

Scene 29

Street outside Gloomer's house. Afternoon. Dolce and Felicia come back from the bris. They stop.

Felicia: Well, just like I said, the groom died first.

Dolce: I'll miss him a little. The music, the medications.

Felicia: May God forgive him for the wedding he had. Some people are born for weddings, and some people are born for bar-mitzvahs. You have to accept that.

(Dolce gives her a long stare.)

Isn't that so? What are you looking at? I'm still alive. With a healthy man at my side, doing everything that needs to be done. With a good appetite. And the result: I'm not lonely. I'm not lonely.

(Dolce does not take his eyes off her.)

You won't die so fast either. With me, you'll stick around. Felicia will look after you. You are my natural backdrop, my "taken for granted," my "there is no doubt," my "of course," my sweet "of course." (She pinches his behind.) Oy, such a *tuches*, such a *tuches* that God split into two – half for me, half for you.

Dolce: What a vulgar, stinking woman I got. I don't want to share my *tuches* with you! I don't want to share my bed with you! I don't want to share my toilet with you! I don't want to share anything with you! I thought you would die over time! I was wrong! You'll never die! You and your refrigerator, you're both immortal! I'll die! Me! Like Gloomer, I'll die! I will die!

(Felicia slaps him hard across the face.)

Felicia: You'll live! We came together in the fresh air. We laughed together in the stench. We will rest together in the suffocating dirt.

(They exit.)

Scene 30

Street. Night. Silenti walks with a suitcase. Krum enters.

Krum: Silenti, where to?

Silenti (shrugging his shoulders): Going away.

Krum: Where to? Did something happen?

Silenti: No.

Krum: Then why?

Silenti (shrugging): I'm bored. In particular...

Krum: Go on.

Silenti: In particular, I'm bored.

Krum: What are you going to do in a different place?

(Silenti shrugs.)

After all, it'll be the same wherever you go. At least here, people know you.

Silenti: I'm bored.

Krum: Looking for action, are you? You want to try your luck in another place? Tell the truth.

Silenti: No. Just because.

Krum: I know, I know, you want to succeed, you want to be rich, you want a wonderful woman you'll bring back here in an American car to show her the neighborhood you grew up in. Tell the truth! I don't believe you! You kept quiet the whole time, you hid your ambitions. I know these silent types. Secretly dreaming of success, of women!

Silenti: I give you my word: I will remain poor, lonely and bored.

Krum: In that case, stay with us in the muck!

Silenti: I just wanted to get away. I'm bored. Goodbye.

Krum: Who do you think you are, going away and leaving the rest of us here?! Who do you think you are?! Not even a human being! You are one of the comical elements of the landscape of my

youth! Your face, like the crumbling plaster on the walls of the houses on this street, exists only as the backdrop to my life, a page in my novel, it has no other existence – none at all!

(Silenti exits.)

None at all!

Scene 31

Krum's house. Night. The Mother is seated. Krum enters.

Krum: Why aren't you sleeping?

The Mother: I can't.

Krum: Take a sleeping pill.

The Mother: I want a grandchild. A grandchild I could rock in a cradle would put me to sleep.

Krum: What can I do?

The Mother: A grandchild. I was preparing for a wedding.

Krum: So was I.

The Mother: You had Trudy.

Krum: I wanted to have something more than Trudy.

The Mother: You don't.

Krum: I have desires.

The Mother: You have Trudies. Trudies. In your world, in your arm's reach, in the portion fate has granted you – there is nothing more than Trudies. Trudies, and working in an office, and feeding a child, and another, and a mortgage for the rest of your life. There's nothing more for you, my dear son, there are no more toys for you in the world. (Pause.)

Krum: But I do have desires.

The Mother: Give them up.

Krum: I'm going to start writing now.

The Mother: Writing?! Don't bring up that nonsense with me again.

Krum: Try to fall asleep, Mother.

The Mother: There are no more toys in the world for you.

Krum: Sleep, sleep.

The Mother: There are no more toys in the world for you!

Krum: Sleep, Mother, sleep.

The Mother: There are no more toys in the world for you!!

Krum (almost strangling her): Sleep, Mother. Close your eyes, already. Close them.

The Mother: You won't rest until I close them forever. I am the final witness to your failure – murderer!

(Krum exits.)

Scene 32

Hilton ballroom. Tweety and Bertoldo are dancing. Krum enters.

Krum: Remember me?

Tweety: Remind me?

Krum: Krum. We met at Doopa's, before her wedding.

Tweety: Oh, yes. The button.

Krum: I have the button.

Tweety: Keep it.

Krum: Thank you.

Tweety: How is Doopa? How's her marriage?

Krum: Her husband died.

Tweety: Oh, poor Doopa. She is so unsuited to happiness. Weren't you supposed to get married right after her?

Krum: Yes, but I didn't.

Tweety: Oh, you people, really. Did something happen?

Krum: No. In fact, if I can speak candidly, I called off my marriage on... the same evening I met you. (Pause.) How was Capri?

Tweety: I've already forgotten. I'm leaving again tomorrow morning.

Krum: Where to?

Tweety: Los Angeles.

Krum: I've always dreamed of that city.

Tweety: I can only envy you that a place like Los Angeles still evokes such excitement in you.

Krum: And I envy you that you've reached the level where Los Angeles no longer evokes anything in you.

Tweety: And with that mutual envy, let us part.

Krum: Forgive my impertinence. I look at your bottom and I say to myself: that is a bottom that has sat in California. One young lady's bottom has seen more of the world than my mother and I have seen put together. Where is the justice in that?

Tweety (laughing): Which does occasionally make me think: such a bottom, that has seen so much, shouldn't God have exempted such a bottom from having to go to the toilet?

Krum: Take me with you to Los Angeles.

Tweety: Why would I?

Krum: No?

Tweety: No.

Krum: I thought maybe. I mean, I love you. (Pause.) Sorry.

Tweety: Why? You're nice.

Krum: Yes? So shall we?

Tweety: Someone's waiting for me there.

Krum: A man?

Tweety: A man.

Krum: Will you get married?

Tweety: Of course. He's finishing his doctorate, and then – to Brazil.

Krum: And Bertoldo?

Tweety: Bertoldo is temporary.

Krum: Does he know that?

Tweety: He will tomorrow morning.

Krum (going over to Bertoldo): Did you hear that? You're temporary! You're out of here tomorrow! Psssss...

Bertoldo (jerking his head): Ma cosavuolequelcazzo? [What does this prick want?]

Tweety (to Krum): That's it. I think I'll go home.

Krum: I apologize for speaking out of place. I'm trying to write a novel and I'm collecting material.

Tweety: An artist...

Krum: Something like that.

Tweety: Explain to me how it is that you all start off as writers and you end up as waiters.

Krum: That's why it's so important for me to get out of here. I feel it's a matter of life or death. If only I could get out into open spaces...

Tweety: Who's stopping you?

Krum: How? Where to? Who would pay? What would I live on? And my mother?

Tweety: I don't believe that if you want something badly enough it's impossible.

Krum: You don't believe. You float in here on a pink cloud of "everything's possible," perfuming the air with a thin scent of "everything's possible," and you don't believe. And yet there are people for whom "impossible" is not a word to be toyed with.

Tweety: Perhaps one really should feel sorry for people of your type once in a while. The trouble is, I'm pressed for time and I forget.

Krum: I don't forget. People like you are born to hurt people like me.

Tweety: You really are nice. I'll allow you to give me a kiss before you leave.

Krum: With a taste of Los Angeles on your lips – goodbye.

(He leaves.)

Scene 33

Night. Takhtikh sits alone on his balcony. Krum is on the street.

Takhtikh: Hey, Krum.

Krum: Alone again?

Takhtikh: So what? Just because I married Trudy and I have a child, does that make me an insensitive person? I have sensitivities, I have insomnia, you bet I do. And I'll tell you something else: Sometimes I look at Trudy's face and suddenly I want to cry from the affront to all the aspirations and dreams I used to have. Me, with my talents... Instead – Trudy. Every night I

knead her buttocks like a baker. She has black hairs on her thighs and under her nose, I'm sure that's not news to you. But her flesh – you may not be up to date on this – her flesh has begun to ooze. And I love that yellow, hairy spillage more than I love my own life. “More than my own life” – well, I may have gone a little too far. But I can't live without her. I have a terrible attraction to her. Sometimes when I don't see her for half an hour I feel like I'm going to go crazy. Do you see the contradictions? And it's all bouncing around inside me. So who says I've stopped being sensitive and complicated? Why don't you come in?

Krum: I'm in a hurry. Have you finished?

Takhtikh: No, I haven't. You're quiet, you're probably laughing to yourself, saying: “Thank God, this guy's suffering too.” Nonsense. Don't be so quick to rejoice. These are just little bumps in my happiness and Trudy's. You wouldn't understand that, of course. You're a cucumber. Nothing happens to you in life. You don't know what it is to have a burden, to have a home, to have love, to have your own child, yours.

Krum: Good night. (He turns to go.)

Takhtikh: Your mother died. Two hours ago.

(Krum stops.)

Scene 34

Street outside Krum's house. Morning. Undertaker pulls a gurney with The Mother's body on it, shrouded in black. Krum follows.

Undertaker: No relatives?

Krum: I'm the son.

(They keep walking.)

Here's the house. Wait.

(They stop. To the corpse) Rise from the dead, you dear, rotten soul, and reawaken in me my childhood faith that your powers are invincible. Rise, you who birthed me and raised me, whom I trusted that one day would redeem me, that one day you would tear off a mask and behind the façade of suffering and desolation a face of joy would be revealed, and we would laugh, laugh at

the bad dream we'd had. Rise, Mother, and come inside to make lunch for me, for I will not accept any other possibility. I will not. I will not.

(He lets out a howl, as if he is about to burst into tears, but he manages to hold it in.)

No, no, not yet. I am not yet ripe for this kind of crying.

(The sobbing mounts in him again, but he holds it in again.)

No, there will be time for such terrible grief, and I am not yet ready. Later. One has to prepare, to gather strength, to eat well, sleep well, exercise every morning. One has to ripen, to shore oneself up in preparation for that day, and that day will arrive, and I will burst out in a huge tempest of emotion, and a massive wave of tears will wash over me, and every crevice of my soul will open, and I will cry and cry, about everything, about my mother and my life and my loves, and about all the wasted time that will never return, and I will break through the suffocation once and for all, and then I will be pure and fresh – on that day, which I believe is yet to come – pure and fresh and finally ready for life.

(The tears well in him again, and again he manages, with difficulty, to hold them in.)

Not yet. I will exercise every morning. Later.

(The Undertaker pulls the gurney. Krum follows. They exit.)

- End -